
International Academic Conference of
Montreal (IACM) 2005,
2005.9.28-10.8 Montreal Canada¹

Intertextuality and Translation of Poetry

-----A Case Study

INTERTEXTUALITÉ ET TRADUCTION DANS LA POÉSIE

----UN CAS D'ÉTUDE

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Abstract: This paper is intended to study translation from the viewpoint of “intertextuality”. By quoting Kristeva, Barthes and Hatim’s view of intertextuality, author works out a more applicable procedure for translator to render intertextual reference in poetry by combing Hatim’s approach with Nida’s “dynamic equivalence”. This essay is composed in the hope of rendering a new dimension to translation studies.

Key Words: intertextuality, dynamic equivalence, translation of poetry

Résumé: Ce texte est destiné à étudier la traduction du point de vue intertextualité . Tout en citant les idées de Kristeva , Barthes et Hatim , l’auteur arrive à dégager une procédure plus applicable pour les traducteurs afin de presenter la référence intertextuelle dans la poésie à travers la combinaison de l’approche de Hatim avec celled de l’équivalence dynamique de Nida . Cet essai est rédigé dans l’espoir de donner une nouvelle dimension à l’étude de traduction

Mots-clés: intertextualité, équivalence dynamique, traduction de la poésie

INTRODUCTION

In 21st century, more and more disciplines are brought into the study of translation. “Intertextuality” as an basic concept of semiotics is no exception. The nature of translation makes it possible and necessary to deem “intertextuality” a prominent perspective in translation studies. In this paper, author will study intertextual elements in two versions of Long Fellow’s “A Psalm of Life” to show how to apply “intertextuality” into the translation of poetry.

1.1 What is intertextuality?

Derived from the Latin *intertexto*, meaning to intermingle while weaving, intertextuality is a term first introduced by French semiotician Kristeva in the late sixties. In essays such as “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, Kristeva broke with traditional notions of the author’s

“influences” and the text’s “sources,” positing that all signifying systems, from table settings to poems, are constituted by the manner in which they transform earlier signifying systems. A literary work, then, is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself. “Every text,” she argues, “ is constructed as a mosaic of citations, every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts”(1969:146) Intertextuality is, thus, a way of accounting for the role of literary and extra-literary materials without recourse of traditional notions of authorship. For Roland Barthes, it is the fact of intertextuality that allows the text to come into being.

In Hatim’s *Discourse and the Translator*, he points out“(intertextuality) is the way we relate textual occurrences to each other and recognize them as signs which evoke whole areas of our previous textual experience.”(Hatim, 2001, 120) For him, “they (texts) are always dependent on the prior existence not only of clearly identifiable texts but also of general conditions

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* Received 17 April 2005; accepted 29 April 2005

of appropriateness that may, for example, govern entire genres.”(Hatim, 2001, 125)

2. INTERTEXTUALITY AND TRANSLATION STUDY

2.1 Hatim's theory

Intertextuality is the intrinsic quality of text. In defining text, Kristeva emphasizes the process whereby a text goes back to what precedes it, adding to its ideologically neutral from the whole underlying volume of signification which accrues from experience awareness, etc.” For Hatim, “This is in sum the function of intertextuality.”(Hatim, 2001, 121) From this, it is self-evident that translation and intertextuality are closely related with each other. Just as Hatim says, “Intertextuality provides an ideal testing ground for basic semiotic notions in practical pursuits such as translating and interpreting. It is ‘semiotics at work’.”(Hatim, 2001, 121)

In his masterpiece, *Discourse and Translator*, he also works out a framework for translators to recognize and transfer intertextual reference. As far as he is concerned, intertextuality is an aspect of both the reception and production of texts, while readers and writers wrestle with intertextual reference as an important aspect of text construction and deconstruction. Firstly, translators will encounter intertextual signals. They are all tangible elements in a text, which trigger the process of intertextual search. Secondly, translators “embark on the more crucial exercise of charting the various routes through which a given signal links up with its pre-text (Pre-texts are the sources from which intertextual signals are drawn, to which they refer, or by which they are inspired.). Then, according to different types of pre-text, author raises three questions, first two concerning the ‘form’ and ‘function’, while the third assessing the priority of one over the other in the production of the sign. In other words, the principal aim is to evaluate which aspects of the sign are to be retained and which aspects must be jettisoned in the act of transferring that sign into another language. Lastly, he develops a set of procedures in order of importance for translators to follow in transferring the intertextual reference.

2.2 author's opinion

Generally speaking, Hatim and Mason suggest a rather good way for translators to follow in tackling the intertextual reference in the process of translation. But in practical process of translation, the procedure he suggested is too complicated to follow, especially in the third step, it seems rather difficult to decide which one takes priority according to their importance. In my opinion, his theory can be more applicable by

combining it with Nida's “dynamic equivalence”, which center on reader's response.

Firstly, translator should find all the intertextual signals of the original, then he makes every effort to find the pretext of this signals in the SL. From this pretext, translator can make clear what association this signals can evoke for the SL readers from their previous experience. According to Nida, “dynamic equivalence” is “determined primarily by a comparison of the impact and appeal I the texts of the source language and the target language. So, translators should take fully consideration the ways in which intended readers might respond to such a translation.”(Nida, 1984, 91) That is to say, translators should focus on the ways in which verbal signs have meaning for receptors. So, translators should try to find in the target language and culture system the intertextual signals which can call up the same association (pre-text) as the source language signals do. But in most cases, the chance that we find the appropriate intertextual signals is so slim. By “appropriate”, I mean this signals should not have an associative meaning which is really not to be found in the original text, which will cause misunderstanding in the TT readers. So, when the notion of intertextuality is brought into translation study, translators are required to have two repertoires of language data in two distinctive cultures. That is to say, translators should be quite familiar with so many pretexts in which intertextual signals can be chosen as the best rendering in translation. If by any chance translators can not find any “appropriate” intertextual signals in the TL, he or she should just paraphrase the original SL signals to explain their connotation for TL readers.

2.3 Translation of Poetry

As we know, no literary activity has been the subject of more wisecracks than the translation of poetry. The American poet Robert Frost coined the classical definition: “Poetry is what gets lost in translation.” Then, why is poetry often lost by the translator? I believe that every poem, meter-and-rhyme verse or unrhymed one is composed of large numbers of culture-loaded elements, which require the knowledge about other relevant texts in SL culture. And It is knowledge of previous texts that hampers TL readers' ability to appreciate the poetry. How to transfer intertextual elements in poetry keeps to be a headache for every translators. In the next section, I will make a careful study of intertextual elements in two versions of Long fellow's poem to show a tentative way to solve this problem.

3. A CASE STUDY

Then, let's compare and appreciate two versions of Long Fellow's A Psalm of Life to see how this approach is applied in the process of translating or, exactly, the evaluation of the product.

3.1 background of the poem and poet

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was perhaps the best loved American poet. His lyrical poetry is easy and lilting like a melody. In his words the reader can find some small lesson on life, mostly that life itself is beautiful. This is best illustrated in his poem—*A Psalm of Life*. Mr. Longfellow once said that he kept it some time in manuscript, unwilling to show it to any one, it being a voice from my inmost heart, at a time when I was rallying from depression. The depression maybe refers to the fact that his wife died few months before he wrote this poem. He took his wife's death and interpreted it as a sign to look at life as fleeting and it passes quickly. I feel that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, after his wife's death, had an optimistic view on life in the poem—*A Psalm of Life*. Before it was published in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, October, 1838, it was read by the poet to his college class at the close of a lecture on Goethe. Its title, though used now exclusively for this poem, was originally, in the poet's mind, a generic one. He notes from time to time that he has written a psalm of death, or another psalm of life. The 'psalmist' is thus the poet himself. When printed in the *Knickerbocker* it bore as a motto the lines from Crashaw:

Life that shall send

A Challenge to its end,

And when it comes, say, Welcome, friend."

So, from this motto, we can grasp the spirit of the whole poem.

3.2 Analysis of two versions

"A Psalm of Life" is the first English poem that was translated into Chinese. The two versions discussed here were completed by Huang gaoxin and Huang xinqu. In the following passages, we just call them xin's version or qu's version.

3.2.1 grave

Life is real! Life is earnest!

And the grave is not its goal;

xin's version: 人生多真切，它絕非虛度！

一抔黃土哪里會是它歸宿

qu's version: 生命是真實的！生活是嚴肅的！

它們的終點決不是墳場！

In the *OALD*, the entry of grave includes two kinds of meaning. The first one is "hole dug in the ground for a dead body; mound of earth or monument over it." The second one is in the rhetoric sense. It is "death; being dead". Obviously, "grave" is always used to signify death in western culture. They have idioms such as "from the cradle to the grave"(from birth to death) and "have one foot in the grave"(be so old or ill that one is not likely to live much longer), or saying such as "turn

in one's grave"(of a person who is already dead likely to be offended or angry). So, "grave" in this poem can be put into "墳場" literally. But as a translator who lives in the Chinese culture, "一抔黃土" seems to be a better choice, which can evoke a host of associations. In "Han Book", there is "取長陵一抔土", meaning dig a hole for a dead body. In Tang dynasty, a famous man of letters, Luo Bingwang said "假令愚民取長陵一抔土，陛下何以加其法乎?" One of ten generals of china, Chen Yi have a poem says, "大庾嶺上暮天低，歐亞風雲望欲迷國。賊賣盡一抔土，彌天烽火舉紅旗。" In the "The Dream of Red Masion", Daiyu once composed a piece of poem about burying fallen flowers to express in sorrow and loneliness in Daguanyuan. In this poem, we can also find "未若錦囊收豔骨，一抔淨土掩風流。" The poems or sayings listed above are all the pretexts for most readers in Chinese culture. So, "一抔黃土" is an satisfactory intertextual signals reproduced by the translator which can have the same associative effects on TT readers as "grave" on SL readers.

3.2.2 cattle

In the world's broad field of battle,

In the bivouac of life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!

Be a hero in the strife!

Xin's version: 在風雲世界的廣闊戰場，

在人生征途的野宿營帳，

別像默默的牛羊任驅趕！

要爭取做英雄，能征慣戰！

Qu's version: 在世界的遼闊的戰場上，

在生命的露宿的營地上，

別作默默無聲、任人驅使的牛羊，

要在戰鬥中當一名闖將！

In this stanza, two translators both use "牛羊" to render the English word "cattle". "羊" here is addition of word which is not included in the original line. Why do they add another image here, for a better rhythm or not? There is not a definitely answer. But here "cattle" in English and "牛" in Chinese may have slight difference in the connotative meaning. In English, besides the basic meaning of "large farm animals", "cattle" can also refer to those people of little importance. In Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem", we can read "those who die as cattle". In Bible, cattle are always related with sacrificial rites. On contrary, "牛" as the main helper of the peasant in Chinese, it can always remind people of many good qualities, such as diligence, selflessness or something else. Lu Xun once talked about his motto of life "附首甘為孺子牛". There is also saying, "牛吃的是草，擠出來卻是奶" There is also a four character-"老牛舐犢", symbolizing the tender love of parents for their child. That is to say, one kind of animal in the English and in Chinese have different

connotations. Readers in the Chinese culture are inclined to associate “牛” with some qualities not intended in notion of “cattle”.

3.2.3 God, heart

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!

Let the dead Past bury its dead!

Act-act in the living Present!

Heart within, and **God** o'erhead!

Xin's version: 將來再美好也別空指望！

讓死的過去把死埋葬！

幹！在活生生的現在就幹！

胸中是赤心，上帝在雲端！

Qu's version: 莫信託未來，不管它怎樣歡暢！

讓逝去的歲月將死者埋葬！

行動吧，就在活著的此刻行動！

胸中有紅心，頭頂有上蒼！

In this stanza, there are two dictions deserving study from intertextual point of view.

In most cases, “heart” is related to the religion.

“Honor thy god in the heart”, “God alone sees the heart, the heart alone sees God.” (psalm 17) For westerners God resides in the heart of every one. Only through heart, can men to communicate with God. But in two versions, “heart” is rendered as “赤心” or “紅心” respectively, we can know by intuition that “赤心” is always associated with loyalty to motherland. Wen Tianxiang, a national hero and patriotic poet, composed many poems in which “赤心” is reiterated “赤心光昭日月；清名終古長留.”, “漢賊明大義，赤心貫蒼穹.” And eminent poet DuFu wrote down “李相將軍擁薊門白頭惟有赤心存.” As for “紅心”, it is quoted in the

writings with political backgrounds, such as the very popular motto in 70s’ “一個紅心，兩手準備”. Besides the “紅心”, the character “紅” tends to be associated with political sense.(紅旗，紅軍，紅岩，紅色政權). So, “紅心” and “赤心” are not satisfactorily intertextual signals for TL readers.

The second intertextual element is “God”, which was translated as “上蒼” and “上帝”. In xin’s version “God” was translated literally as “上帝”, which is an acceptable rendering. But in qu’s version, he chose another diction “上蒼” to reproduce the intertextual sense in Chinese culture. According to *SuWen*, “上蒼”, “蒼天” originally mean sky. And in *JiJiZuanGu*, we can also find that “蒼天” and “上蒼” are always connected with Buddhism. In qu’s version, the religious sense of God is transferred by author word with religious sense-“上蒼”. Although “God” and “上蒼” belong to two totally different religion. But for readers in different cultures, they can evoke the similar associations-the religion sense.

CONCLUSION

With intertextuality to be an essential condition of all texts, it is urgent task for us to bring this new dimension into the translation studies. For translators, especially those of poetry, they should be aware of the fact that “different groups of text users bring different knowledge and belief systems to their processing of texts”. So, in the process of transferring intertextual elements in the poetry, different associative effects on readers in two distinctive cultures should be taken into consideration.

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APPENDIX:

A Psalm of Life

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Tell me not in mournful numbers,

Life is but an empty dream!

For the soul is dead that slumbers,

And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!

And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,

Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,

Is our destined end or way;

But to act, that each to-morrow

Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,

And our hearts, though stout and brave,

Still, like muffled drums, are beating

Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,

In the bivouac of life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!

Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!

Let the dead Past bury its dead!

Act-act in the living Present!

Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us

We can make our lives sublime,

And, departing, leave behind us

Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints that perhaps another,

Sailing o'er life's solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,

With a heart for any fate;

Still achieving, still pursuing,

Learn to labour and to wait.

生命的禮贊

黃新渠 譯

別用悲傷的語調對我低吟，

“人生不過是幻夢一場”！

因為沉睡中的靈魂已經死去，

萬物並非它們顯示的模樣。

生命是真實的！生活是嚴肅的！

它們的終點決不是墳場；

“你來自塵土，必歸於塵土”，

但這是指肉體，靈魂並未死亡。

我們註定的結局和道路，

既不是享樂，也不是悲傷；

而是行動，爲了每一個明天，

使我們比今天走得更遠更長。

藝術長久，韶光飛逝，

我們的心儘管英勇而堅強，

卻仍像陣陣低沉的鼓聲，

正朝著墳墓把哀樂敲響。

在世界的遼闊的戰場上，

在生命的露宿的營地上，

別作默默無聲、任人驅使的牛羊，

要在戰鬥中當一名闖將！

莫信託未來，不管它怎樣歡暢！

讓逝去的歲月將死者埋葬！

行動吧，就在活著的此刻行動！

胸內有紅心，頭頂有上蒼！

偉大人物的生平把我們提醒，

我們能使我們的一生變得高尚，

在離開人間時，也能讓足印

遺留在我們身後的時間的沙灘上。

呵，足印！也許另一位兄弟，

當他航行在生命莊嚴的海洋上，

不幸遇難，看見了這些足印，

他就會使勇氣重新增長。

那麼讓我們振奮起來行動吧，

我們準備迎接任何命運的風浪；

永遠要有所作爲，不斷追求，

學會勞動，也學會等待和期望。

生之頌

黃杲火斤 譯

別用悲切的詩句對我唱：

“人生只是虛幻的夢一場！”

因為昏睡的靈魂已死亡，

而事物不是看來那模樣。

人生多真切！它決非虛度！

一抔黃土哪里會是它的歸宿；

“你來自塵土，得重歸塵土，”

這話所指的並不是靈魂。

我們命定的終點和道路

既不是享樂，也不是悲苦；

行動吧；要讓每一個明天

發現我們比今天走得遠。

學藝費光陰，時日去匆忙，

任我們的心勇敢又堅強，

依然像一些蒙住的鞀鼓一

敲打著哀樂走向那墳墓。

在風雲世界的廣闊戰場，

在人生征途的野宿營帳，

別像默默的牛羊任驅趕！

要爭取做英雄，能征慣戰！

將來再美好也別空指望！

讓死的過去把死埋葬！

幹！在活生生的現在就幹！

胸中是赤心，上帝在雲端！

偉人的生平向我們指出：

我們能使此生超群脫俗一

一朝逝去，時間的沙灘上

將留下我們的腳印行行。

在莊嚴的生活之海航行，

也許有兄弟會遭到不幸，

會因為航船沉沒而絕望一

但見到腳印，又變得頑強。

讓我們挺起身，行動起來，

憑對付任何命運的胸懷，

不斷去收穫，不斷去追求；

永遠在學著苦幹和等候。

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